

Solid Waste Management Education: Stimulating Oklahoma Initiatives

Solid waste management is a topic every community must address at several levels, and OSU Cooperative Extension Service has taken on the challenge of providing up-to-date education to SWM professionals, local decision makers and general citizens. With each person generating 4.5 pounds of waste per day and communities facing tight operating budgets, the waste must be handled in a convenient and economical way and in a way that meets the environmental requirements of permitting agencies.

OSU Cooperative Extension Service strives in Oklahoma to highlight the environmental benefits of SWM. Educational resources are developed and disseminated through engagements, personal contacts, e-mail and the Web site. The Web site, <http://agecon.okstate.edu/waste/> and its predecessors have been consistently available to the public since 1999. Topics addressed have included “use less stuff”, recycling, illegal dumping and water quality interaction, electronic trash, littering problems and issues, “America Recycles Day” and SWM professional organizations. Venues have included state and county fairs, professional society meetings, educational programs and libraries, classrooms, Earth Days and pow wows.

OSU Cooperative Extension Service has partnered with various state agencies, tribes, non-government organizations, citizens’ groups including under-represented communities, SWM professional groups and educational institutions to address SWM issues. The benefits of these relationships have produced well-attended educational programs and subsequent speaking engagements and projects. Several conference series have become self-sustaining through partnerships.

SWM grants awarded to OSU Cooperative Extension Service through the efforts of Sarah Kimball, solid waste management assistant specialist, have enabled several yearly conference series and numerous targeted educational efforts. Grantors have included the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (awarded 10 years in a row), and USDA Rural Development (awarded 8 out of 9 years). A few highlights are listed below:

- In 1999, a series of workshops entitled “Making Solid Waste Management Work for You” took place around the state and helped renew interest in Oklahoma. In Oklahoma City, solid waste workshops included “Household Hazardous Waste Workshop” in July 1999 and “Recycling, Benefits for Oklahoma’s Communities and Environment” in September 2000. In 2003, the Solid Waste Association of North America adopted the conference series and OSU Cooperative Extension Service continues to partner. The 2008 SWANA/USDA Symposium will take place Feb. 27-28, and is titled “Tools to Update and Expand Your Waste Management Services.”
- The Environmental Law Enforcement Officer Training Workshop took place in August 2006. This workshop had its origins with the Oklahoma Solid Waste Law Enforcement Training Seminar in May 2000. Over the years, the workshops have reached more than 300 county commissioners, sheriffs and deputies, tribal police, city managers, fire department staff, public works officials and elected public and tribal officials.
- A SWM session was organized for the 2006 Oklahoma Municipal League Conference, and its success led to another SWM session planned for the 2007 OML Conference (Sept. 12, 11 a.m. -12 p.m., Tulsa Convention Center). Topics include automation – conversion/transition issues, household hazardous waste collections, maximizing efficiency, recycling as part of integrated waste management and information about SWANA.

For more information, contact the OSU Cooperative Extension Service Solid Waste Management Education Program at www.agecon.okstate.edu/waste/; or contact Sarah Kimball, assistant waste management specialist, by e-mail sarah.kimball@okstate.edu, or phone 405-744-9827.